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FM AMEMBASSY RIGA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5817

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 0001

RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY 0001

RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA PRIORITY 0002

RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK PRIORITY 0119

RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0032

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

RHMFIS/CDR USTRANSCOM SCOTT AFB IL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L RIGA 000257

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/08/2019

TAGS: MARR MOPS PREL AF UZ LG

SUBJECT: TRANSCOM COMMANDER'S VISIT TO RIGA CONFIRMS STRONG LATVIAN SUPPORT FOR NDN

Classified By: Charge d'affaires a.i. Bruce D. Rogers. Reason: 1.4 (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The May 5 - 6 visit of TRANSCOM Commander General Duncan McNabb provided an opportunity to thank the Latvians for their support for the Northern Distribution Network (NDN). McNabb assured the Latvians that all arrangements in Latvia are fine; any potential choke points would likely occur further down the transport line. He welcomed offers by the Latvians to assist with contacts in Central Asia. General McNabb's announcement of a DLA survey visit in summer was appreciated by all Latvian interlocutors, who pledged to have a focused program for the team. The General's visit came shortly after the deaths of two Latvian soldiers in Afghanistan and was welcomed as a sign of American support for Latvia's active participation in NATO missions. End summary.

¶2. (C) During the visit, General McNabb had an opportunity to meet with the President and the Ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs. He also toured the facility at Riga port handling cargo for the NDN. He stressed that his purpose in visiting was primarily to thank Latvia for its support of NDN. He emphasized that the route has to be commercially viable and appreciated that using Latvia was. He said that he was very pleased with Latvian support to date. He stressed that the initial test shipments had gone very well. The regular flow of cargo would commence once the Government of Uzbekistan approved transit of specific cargo. He explained that the Uzbeks had thirty days to approve shipments and we expected approval any day. He reassured the Latvians that there were no problems in Latvia. He provided readouts on his earlier stops in Central Asia. President Zatlers and FM Riekstins both offered to engage with their counterparts in Central Asia if needed. Zatlers said he hoped to visit Azerbaijan and Tajikistan this summer. Riekstins advised that serious discussions with the Tajiks should be left to the side until needed to motivate the Uzbeks. McNabb welcomed Latvian willingness to help and said that just keeping up a dialogue with the Central Asians on the NDN would be useful to keep it on their minds.

¶3. (C) General McNabb talked about the potential broader economic benefits once the NDN is fully operational. It could open up new trade routes to benefit both Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries. President Zatlers seemed particularly interested in this, following on his business-focused visit to Central Asia last year, and talked about the larger role in economic benefit this could play. All Latvian interlocutors warmly welcomed the General's announcement that DLA would visit Riga this summer to look at possibilities for local purchase. He underscored, though, that Latvia had to be competitive regarding the value of its products. He explained that DLA is not a part of TRANSCOM and was coming to gather information on potential

opportunities, not to sign contracts. The FM and his team stressed that they had worked with the trade associations to develop a list of serious companies with international experience in the sectors identified by DLA as being of greatest need so that the visit would be focused and crisp.

¶4. (U) The General visited just after the deaths of two Latvian soldiers in Afghanistan on May 1. His personal message of condolence and the presentation of a letter from President Obama to President Zatlers were well received. His participation in the ceremony for the return of the fallen soldiers was welcomed as a visible sign of the US standing by Latvia at this time.

¶5. (U) TRANSCOM has cleared this message.

ROGERS